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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2006

In Today's Papers

Bulent Ecevit Dies

All papers report former Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, 81, died at military hospital in Ankara late Sunday after nearly six months in a coma following a stroke. President Ahmet Necdet Sezer said "The Turkish nation will always respectfully remember his service to the country." Prime Minister Erdogan said "Our sorrow is deep over the death of Ecevit who served our country as a politician and statesman." The main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said in a statement "Ecevit was a leader and a teacher. It is the end of an era." Baykal, who is in Chile to participate in a meeting of the Socialist International, said he will cut short his trip after he heard about Ecevit's death, and return to Turkey.

Ecevit, who served four terms as Turkey's Prime Minister, has become the target of fierce criticism in the recent years, but his refinement and honesty have never been questioned, papers comment. Ecevit's funeral will be held on Wednesday.

Saddam Sentenced to Death by Hanging

All papers report the deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and six of his former top aides have been found guilty of ordering the killing of 148 Shiites in the town of Dujail in 1982 and have been given a sentence of death by hanging for crimes against humanity. Yeni Safak says Saddam's defense counsel called the sentence "an election gift for President Bush." Papers quote President Bush as saying the ruling, "a milestone for Iraq," was "a great success for Iraq's young democracy." Papers also report the decision will divide Iraq further, with the Shiites celebrating in Baghdad's Sadr City and thousands of angry Sunnis protesting in Saddam's birthplace of Tikrit. Sabah says Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) officials are concerned that the ruling could lead to an increase in Sunni-Shiite tensions.

Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul said on Sunday Turkey attached importance to the unity and political integrity of Iraq. Gul said,

"The Iraqi people suffered a lot. Millions of people died both because of the meaningless wars during the period of Saddam and the wars with Iran and Kuwait. It is wrong to think that whether the confusion would end if Iraq splits up, it will only make Iraq enter into chaos".

Calling the verdict controversial, Gungor Mengi in the mass appeal Vatan believes that an international tribunal would have been more suitable for the Saddam case: "The death sentence for Saddam Hussein comes from an Iraqi court under a Kurdish chairman. The verdict serves basically as a thank you note for President Bush on the eve of the Congressional elections. Had President Bush at least showed some respect to the international norms [by allowing an international tribunal] during the trial process of Saddam Hussein, the verdict would not be that controversial even if it ended up a death sentence. The path to the gallows for Saddam Hussein will also be the spark for a civil war in Iraq. The danger is so grave that even the brutal dictator Saddam Hussein felt obliged to call for alm in Iraq."

Mehmet Barlas noted that the demise of Saddam "will not pave the way for a US exit" from Iraq in the mass appeal Sabah: "Unlike the Milosevic trial which was conducted by a special tribunal at The Hague, Saddam was tried by an Iraqi court in the midst of the American and British occupation of the country. In the end, there is a precise verdict that Saddam will be hanged in a month. On the other hand, the demise of Saddam will not pave the way for the US to exit Iraq. Moreover, Saddam's death will not unite the members of different sects in Iraq which are killing each other every day. Saddam will be gone soon. As a matter of fact, he was morally dead following the killing of his two sons anyway. When it comes to the Iraq issue, President Bush is also dead in the political sense."

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Comparing Saddam Hussein's crimes and President Bush's mistakes after the occupation of Iraq, Oral Calislar argued in the leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet: "Saddam was a brutal dictator and his regime was the facilitating factor for the foreign intervention.

Everybody at that time believed that the US intervention was something good because the alternative was an Iraq with a merciless dictator. Supporters of the American invasion believed that the US would bring democracy to the region through invasion. In the end, Saddam was sentenced to death by a court established by the invaders. Whether he will really be executed is something to be seen. Yet the death sentence basically comes for a massacre committed by Saddam Hussein. One wonders who is responsible for the massacres which have been going on during the last three years. President Bush dragged his country as well as the entire world into a very dangerous adventure by paving the way for colossal massacres in Iraq. The hanging of Saddam will take Iraq to another bloody and fearful period. The ongoing situation even puts Saddam into the victim role, which adds another pessimistic note to the world's future."

Erdogan Signals Change to Article 301

Prime Minister Erdogan said at a meeting with the representatives of various NGOs on Sunday that Article 301 does not contradict EU regulations. Erdogan met NGOs including Turkish Union of Chambers (TOBB) and trade unions confederations Hak-Is and Turk-Is. "We are studying several options for how we can handle Article 301 in harmony with the spirit of the EU-oriented reforms," Erdogan said, without elaborating. Radikal reports Erdogan had asked the NGO representatives to table concrete proposals for amending the article. Dailies comment that Erdogan had ruled out changes to Article 301 last week, but that in a last-ditch effort to soften the upcoming EU Commission progress report on Turkey, he signaled the article could be amended. Papers expect the EU report to be released November 8 to say Turkey needs to boost the rights of women, of the Kurds and non-Muslim religious groups, and rein in the military.

Secularists Demonstrate against AKP

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report that 12,000 Turks marched in the capital Ankara over the weekend to protest against the rising Islamist influence under the ruling AKP

government. During the rally named "People's March for the Republic," the demonstrators representing 112 NGOs shouted "Turkey is secular, will remain secular" and "Independent Turkey" and protested against PM Erdogan's AK Party. Among the protesters were several retired army generals and officers. Sener Eruygur, the head of the secular Kemalist Thought Society and a former army general, suggested that Erdogan had ambitions to become Turkey's next president. "There are plans to occupy the sublime presidential office," Eruygur said, "We will not allow that."

Baykal Calls for Early Polls

Hurriyet, Milliyet, and Radikal report the main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal, in Chile to participate in the Socialist International meetings, said Turkey urgently needed to go to early elections. Baykal lashed out at Prime Minister Erdogan for telling the press that CHP lawmakers have asked the AKP members not to hold early polls because they were in a financially difficult situation. Baykal said, "It is the PM himself who is afraid of early elections. Our position is clear -- Turkey must go to early elections before the presidential elections."

TV News:

(NTV, 7.00 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Prime Minister Erdogan said press reports about flash floods that killed 39 people in southeast Turkey last week had been

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"exaggerated."

- A tent village will be set up in the southeastern Sanliurfa for people hit by floods and 200 new houses will be set up in Batman.

- Following his talks in Lisbon, Turkey's chief EU negotiator Ali Babacan said Portugal had reiterated support for Turkey's EU membership.

- Turkey's ruling AKP will hold its party convention on November 11 in Ankara.

- Turkey is to buy 17 S-70B Seahawk helicopters from Sikorsky Aircraft.

International News

- Two Hamas militants have been killed in an Israeli missile attack on a group of Palestinians in northern Gaza Strip.

- Richard Perle, a leading proponent of the US-led invasion of Iraq, said devastating dysfunction within the Bush administration has turned the US policy in Iraq into a disaster.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON